

## INTRODUCTION

Just a few weeks ago I came back from a short, too short, visit to the Galapagos Islands. With my wife, I saw many tortoises, marine iguanas, sun bathing seals and listened to the songs of several species of Darwin Finches. I visited once again the Charles Darwin Research Station.

What a wonderful experience, the sixth or seventh in my life! I remember my first travel to the Enchanted Islands, in 1958, when I was sent by UNESCO to negotiate our first agreement with the Ecuadorean government and to propose the exact site where our Station should be built. Nothing existed. Everything had to be done.

Since that time, the Galapagos Islands are not only the place where a fabulous natural evolution found its showcase, with their tortoises, iguanas and finches. At the same time they are the site of a human and scientific success story. Due to world-wide cooperation, a renowned Research Station has been built and expanded year after year. Scientists from all over the world have been coming for thirty years to investigate biological problems, in the field of evolution or adaptations to particular habitats, in one of the most privileged places in the world.



Marine Iguanas

Photograph by I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt

The first aim of the Foundation was, and still is, to protect Galapagos wildlife and habitats from human impact. It has perfectly played its role. The greatest satisfaction of the international community was to see that the Ecuadorean government and the responsible authorities cooperated since the early beginnings with great enthusiasm. The Galapagos National Park is working in the most efficient way to protect what is under its own responsibility. Our Ecuadorean friends are aware that the Galapagos are a unique part of the common heritage of mankind.

I have the highest consideration for the part taken nowadays by enthusiastic young Ecuadorean research workers in the scientific programmes, all more or less oriented towards a better protection of nature or sound land management.

However, many menaces still survive. The consequences of introduced plants or animals are still without definite solution. Land encroachment by settlers is still a potential threat. The impact of an increasing number of tourists needs to find a solution satisfactory for all.

Nevertheless, for decades the situation in the Galapagos Islands has improved and is still improving, due to a close cooperation between the Ecuadorean authorities and the international community of scientists and conservationists.

On these pages you will read the names of many of those who contributed to our success. We all should keep them in our memory, as many have left us forever.

We are particularly grateful to Corley Smith, who acted so efficiently as Secretary General, for having written this vivid story of our Foundation, a very difficult task due to the manifold aspects of an international enterprise in which so many people and organizations were involved.

Jean DORST,  
Membre de l'Institut  
Past President